



# Texas flood

## Heavy rain and coveted awards

Story and venue photos by Joe Sage

**T**exas has a lot in common with Arizona when it comes to variety of vehicle shoppers and vehicle usage, from mud ruts and ranches to malls and office towers. Thus we find value in attending the comparative vehicle events held by the Texas Auto Writers Association (TAWA). Our first was last fall's Texas Truck Rodeo, an event of such prominence that its awards are bragged about in national advertising, even Super Bowl caliber. It's also a great group of folks, full of Texas hospitality.

Spring brings the Texas Auto Roundup, and this was our first, although we've reported the results before. Held this year in early March, at Texas Motor Speedway near Fort Worth, it's a chance for analytical media types to drive contenders back-to-back on public roads, with appropriate vehicles also getting track time. Many of the vehicles shipped in by the manufacturers are indeed just begging for that track, and what a lineup it is—Hellcat, AMG, GT-R, Golf R, Stingray and more.

We always keep an eye on the weather when headed to an out-of-town event, at least partly hoping for some kind of dramatic change of pace from Arizona's typically perfect weather. And on this trip, we got it. Precipitation was forecast at 100 percent, and the radar maps were bearing this out. We flew in through heavy skies, which opened up just about as we arrived, and the deluge continued for the duration of the event.

This did not dampen anyone's spirits, but it did keep us off the track. The road courses were good, too—an inner and an outer loop on racetrack grounds, with challenging chicanes and solid straightaways, and there was a longer run out

onto the Interstate, which we took only a couple of times, the schedule being tight.

We had 56 vehicles to try, from 26 brands. Judging is organized into 14 vehicle award categories by size, performance, utility, green credentials, price and combinations thereof.

Two ultimate prizes are for the annual Car of Texas and Family Car of Texas.

Awards are also given for best new feature, best new interior and best value.

The manufacturers make their own decisions on what contenders to enter.

There were three display-only vehicles on hand, as well: the upcoming 2016 Fiat 500X (see elsewhere in this issue), the 2015 Infiniti QX80 and the last-of-its-generation 2015 Mazda MX-5 Miata Grand Touring with power hardtop.

We drove all day, one mad dash after another, car to car, making our swaps in a dry track garage. Selections are discretionary, and demand varied quite a bit.

Some decisions are obvious, some are tough to make. Some are based on specific attributes and some are subjective. Most are plenty of both. There are always some confirmations of previous experience and always some surprises.

Toward late afternoon, a few manufacturers were cleared to host right-seat ride-alongs on the very wet track. We stuck to the road courses and our hands-on evaluation duties—more cars this way.

As daylight faded and the rain continued to pour down, drivers retreated to their laptops and pads to enter judgment.

An 18-page online ballot had 128 questions and took an average of 40 minutes to complete, providing extensive cross-tabulated data for manufacturers' review.

Each category receives votes for first, second and third place. A weighted algorithm (second and third place votes count, at lower values) determines a first place trophy winner and one runnerup in each category.

We had heard that imports seldom take first place at this event. Some categories do seem to lean that way, but not all, by any means. Categories, winners and scores are as follows. Raw scoring tallies



### AWARDS : VEHICLES OF TEXAS 2015



**Subcompact Car:**  
Kia Forte5 SX



**Compact Car:**  
Ford Focus SE



**Midsize Car:**  
Chrysler 200



**Midsize Luxury Car:**  
Cadillac ATS Coupe AWD Premium



**Full-size Car:**  
Dodge Charger R/T Scat Pack



**Full-size Luxury Car:**  
Mercedes-Benz S500 Coupe



**Green Vehicle:**  
Lexus NX 300h



**Minivan:**  
Toyota Sienna Limited



Photos: Major League Photography, except for Ford and Lexus (manufacturer) and Mercedes-Benz (Joe Sage)



are given, to demonstrate how tight some were. All are 2015 models unless noted.

**Subcompact Car of Texas:**

- 1st: Kia Forte5 SX .....83
- 2nd: Chevrolet Trax LTZ .....72
- OTHERS: Toyota Yaris SE).....55

**Compact Car of Texas:**

- 1st: Ford Focus SE .....46
- 2nd: Acura ILX (2016).....42
- OTHERS: Hyundai Elantra GT (2016) .....38
- Dodge Dart GT .....35
- Chevrolet Cruze Turbo Diesel .....32

**Midsize Car of Texas:**

- 1st: Chrysler 200 .....49
- 2nd: Mazda6 Grand Touring (2016).....40
- OTHERS: Ford Fusion Titanium AWD .....36
- Toyota Camry XSE.....35
- Sonata Sport 2.0T .....34
- Nissan Altima SL .....10

**Midsize Luxury Car of Texas:**

- 1st: Cadillac ATS Coupe AWD Premium...93
- 2nd: Lincoln MKZ Black Label AWD .....82
- OTHERS: Mercedes-Benz E400 Cabriolet...66

**Full-size Car of Texas:**

- 1st: Dodge Charger R/T Scat Pack .....107
- 2nd: Toyota Avalon Hybrid Limited .....94

**Full-size Luxury Car of Texas:**

- 1st: Mercedes-Benz S500 Coupe .....\*81
  - 2nd: Jaguar XJ Long Wheelbase .....\*81
  - OTHER: Chrysler 300C Platinum V8 .....71
- NOTE: \*S500 won the category by having the most first-place votes (16:12). Jaguar matched points by having far more seconds (20:11).

**Green Vehicle of Texas:**

- 1st: Lexus NX 300h .....89
  - 2nd: Toyota Camry Hybrid SE.....68
  - OTHERS: Kia Soul EV Plus .....64
- NOTE: Toyota Avalon Hybrid scored 94, as entered in the full-size car category.

**Minivan of Texas:**

- 1st: Toyota Sienna Limited .....89
  - 2nd: Chrysler Town & Country S .....82
- NOTES This non-track category often has only one entrant, yet this year's Toyota went on to win the broader Family Car of Texas award.

**Activity Vehicle of Texas:**

- 1st: Lexus NX 200t F SPORT .....\*80
  - 2nd: Jeep Renegade Limited .....\*80
  - OTHER: Kia Sorento SXL (2016).....59
- NOTE: \*Another tie decided by first place votes.

**Performance Compact of Texas:**

- 1st: Volkswagen Golf R .....55
- 2nd: Ford Focus ST .....50
- OTHERS: Subaru BRZ Series.Blue .....27
- Fiat 500C Abarth Cabrio .....20
- MINI 4-Door Cooper S Hardtop manual...22
- Scion FR-S manual (w TRD options).....21
- Honda CR-Z HPD .....8

NOTES Abarth, with 20, places above MINI and Scion on basis of 2nd and 3rd place votes.

**Performance Coupe of Texas:**

- 1st: Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat .....54
- 2nd: Alfa Romeo 4C Coupe .....46
- OTHERS: Lexus RC F .....40
- Ford Mustang GT .....33
- Dodge Challenger 392 HEMI Scat Pk Shk...18
- BMW 228xi Coupe .....16

**Performance Sedan of Texas:**

- 1st: Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat .....116
- 2nd: Cadillac CTS Vsport TT .....91

**Performance Utility of Texas:**

- 1st: Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT .....85
- 2nd: Land Rover Range Rover Sport S'chg...78
- Mercedes-Benz GLA45 AMG .....59

**Supercar of Texas:**

- 1st: Bentley Continental GT V8 S Conv...65
- 2nd: Nissan GT-R Premium .....58
- Dodge Viper GTS .....51
- Chevrolet Corvette Stingray Z51 Coupe...50

**Best New Feature:**

Dodge SRT Supercharged 6.2-liter HEMI Hellcat engine (seven contenders).....28.9%

**Best New Interior:**

Lincoln Black Label Modern Heritage Theme (seven contenders).....30.8%

**Best Value:**

Alfa Romeo 4C (five contenders).....33.3%

The event's biggest trophies are not based on the above, but rather are a separate vote from among all vehicles:

**CAR OF TEXAS:**

- 1st: Chrysler 300 .....17
  - 2nd: Alfa Romeo 4C Coupe .....16
- NOTES (29) vehicles received votes.

**FAMILY CAR OF TEXAS:**

- 1st: Toyota Sienna minivan .....20
  - 2nd: Chrysler 300C .....15
- NOTES (35) vehicles received votes.

There were no bad apples. Each was entered because of its builder's firm confidence. Competition was keen, yet in the end, votes were surprisingly consistent.

It is logistically impossible for anyone to drive all 56 cars, yet there were 885 individual drives recorded. Each driver drove an average of 17 vehicles; the highest number driven by one individual was 38. Each vehicle was driven by an average of 16 drivers; the Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat had the most drivers.

Winners were announced and trophies presented that night, followed by a formal presentation ceremony during the Dallas-Ft Worth Auto Show later in March. ■



**2015 CAR OF TEXAS:**  
Chrysler 300 full-size sedan



**2015 FAMILY CAR OF TEXAS:**  
Toyota Sienna minivan



**Activity Vehicle:**  
Lexus NX 200t F SPORT



**Performance Compact:**  
Volkswagen Golf R



**Performance Coupe:**  
Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat



**Performance Sedan:**  
Dodge Charger SRT Hellcat



**Performance Utility:**  
Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT



**Supercar:**  
Bentley Continental GT V8 S Convertible



**Best New Feature:**  
Dodge SRT Hellcat 6.2-liter Supercharged HEMI V8 Engine



**Best New Interior:**  
Lincoln MKZ Black Label Package



**Best Value:**  
Alfa Romeo 4C Coupe